EC&I 809 Reading Response #7 (Chapters 12, 13, & 14)

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**Evaluation questions** – provide direction and foundation for the evaluation

* + Without these, the evaluator will have considerable difficulty explaining what will be examined, how and why
  + May specify the standards and criteria for judging the program
  + Guide choices for data collection
* Two phases of identifying and selecting questions:

**What is involved in the “Divergent Phase”? What are appropriate sources for questions and criteria and why?**

* Involves all key stakeholders and results in the development of a comprehensive list of potential evaluation questions and concerns
* Sources of questions include: evaluation models, existing standards in the field, research literature, evaluator’s own experiences, consultants
* Evaluation models can help the evaluator consider other areas of focus for the evaluation and educate the stakeholder of issues that could be investigated
* Existing research and theory can be used to identify causes of the problem the program is designed to address, discover successes and failures in remedying these problems, examine conditions that can enhance or inhibit program success with specific kinds of students or clients
* Standards can be useful to: help generate questions or specifying criteria, signal areas that may have been overlooked in the focus on the existing program
* Consultants may provide a more neutral and broader view than that of program staff

**What is the “Convergent Phase”? How to select the questions, criteria and issues to be addressed?**

* Culling the list of possible questions (remaining should have high, direct potential use to many stakeholders)
* Need for convergent phase: budget limits, it becomes harder to manage when a study becomes complicated, attention span of the audience is limited
* Who should be involved – sponsor of the evaluation, key audiences, individuals or groups who will be affected by the evaluation, evaluator
* How should it be carried out? – criteria can be used to rank the potential evaluation questions (can be in the form of a matrix or organized laundry list)
  + Cronbach developed 6 criteria for determining which proposed questions should be investigated
* Process usually will take place with an advisory group consisting of individuals representing the stakeholder groups
* Specifying the Evaluation Criteria and Standards
  + Standards indicate the level of performance a program must reach on the criteria to be considered successful
  + If similar programs exist, they can be examined for standards of performance
  + Important that evaluator and stakeholder group have some idea of levels of performance that are acceptable
  + Standard should be developed to reflect the degree of difference that would be considered sufficiently meaningful to adopt a new program
* Stufflebeam’s structure for evaluation lists the following major functions: focusing the evaluation, collecting, organizing, analyzing, reporting, administering

**What steps are involved in the planning phase?**

* 1. Specify designs for conducting the evaluation (has implications on what sources and methods of data collection will be used)
  + Can be descriptive (shows a trend, illustrates a process, to describe and analyze a program or process) or causal (use experimental or quasi-experimental designs) or a combination of the two
* 2. Identify possible data sources
  + Use of existing data (relevant information may already exist in a readily available form and be inexpensive)
  + When original data is needed use: program recipients, program deliverers, persons involved with program recipients, administrators, policy makers, client
* 3. Identify Appropriate Methods for Collecting Information – a classification scheme is useful to prompt ideas for possible methods (Ex. Page 268)
  + Collection techniques are specified for each question and should be reviewed by the evaluator to assess their technical soundness, availability, relevance, utility
* 4. Insure the methods and instruments chosen are most feasible and cost-effective:
  + Specify sampling procedures to be employed, how information will be collected (conditions), when the information will be collected (timeliness is critical)
* 5. Determine Appropriate Methods and Techniques for Organizing, Analyzing and Interpreting Information
  + Specify how the information is to be analyzed (Identify statistical or summarizing techniques and Interpret the results)
* 6. Determine Appropriate Ways to Report Evaluation Findings
* For each evaluation question selected, specify when answers and interpretations should be prepared and by whom
* Use a matrix to plan the reporting that specifies: audience, content, reporting format, date of the report, context for presentation
* Use work sheets to summarize the evaluation plan which include: information required, design(s), source(s), method(s) for collection, analysis procedures, interpretation procedures, reporting procedures

**What is the management plan and how is it conducted?**

* Is a description of how the evaluation plan will be carried out
* Is needed to structure and control resources (time, money, people)
* Must specify for each evaluation question: tasks to be performed, timelines for each task, personnel and resources needed to complete the task, cost
* 1. Estimate and manage time for conducting evaluation tasks – common techniques used for estimating time on tasks are PERT (used in larger, complex evaluations) and GANTT charts (simple display of chronological scaled time frames)
* 2. Analyze personnel needs and assignments – evaluation quality depends heavily on the capability and energy of those who carry it out
* 3. An evaluation budget usually includes the following cost categories: evaluation staff salary and benefits, consultants, travel and per diem, communication, printing and duplication, data processing, printed materials, supplies and equipment, subcontracts, facility overhead
* 4. A contractual agreement should be worked out that clearly indicates: the purpose of the evaluation, activities to be completed, responsibilities of each

**What are some methods to collect evaluative information and determine cost choices for an evaluation?**

* Collection methods must match the evaluation questions and information needs of stakeholders
* Because most areas are difficult to study, multiple measures are required to assess the issue and also improve validity of the measurement
* Causal questions can be answered through:
  + Experimental and quasi-experimental designs – appropriate when the primary purpose is to answer questions of effectiveness, compares program outcomes with those being considered as an alternative
  + Quasi-experimental designs can be useful when random assignment is difficult or inappropriate (ex. Interrupted time-series design – used when collecting data frequently and policy applies to everyone)
* Descriptive designs – are more quantitative in their approach
  + Cross-sectional design – shows a “snapshot” in time, useful quantitative information on large numbers of individuals or groups (ex. Political poll)
  + Case study –useful when the purpose of the evaluation is to describe the “hows” and “whys” of something, encourage in-depth explorations
* Expansion, Iterative, Transformative designs – encourage use purposes in mixed methods, each design uses different methods to measure different program components
* Sampling – evaluator selects units to study and appropriate sample size
  + If the population of interest is small, collect information from the entire group
  + Random sampling – can be used if the group is large and each unit has an equal and independent chance of being selected
  + Purposive sampling –purpose is not to generalize to a large group, may generate descriptions or new ideas
* Cost analysis – is used to determine different types of costs and determine whether the program outcomes are worth the cost (4 types: cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness, cost-utility, cost-feasibility)

**Part II – Reflection**

These three chapters have continued to paint a clearer picture of the process that is involved from start to finish of an evaluation. As I mentioned in the previous response, I am finding the chart and figures particularly of interest. These coupled with examples of questions to pose at various stages of the evaluation process make me a little more confident in what is being asked of us in the upcoming assignments. Chapter 12 has kind of “set the stage” for me. In reading about the divergent and convergent stages, I see these as some of the most important parts to any evaluation. Without a clear direction, would any evaluation be successful in delivering to its clients? This phase could be difficult for an untrained evaluator as to which questions become most important and not lose track of those questions and criteria as the evaluation continues and evolves.

After reading about the various evaluative approaches discussed in previous chapters, there seems to be more and more stakeholder involvement in these processes than I had earlier thought. In my role of educator, I see this as a vital component to the successful implementation of an evaluation’s findings. This involvement seems to fit with the participant-oriented approach which focuses on responding to an audience’s needs of information. Though in reading the steps in the management plan, we again see that ultimately the clients (usually program administers) have ultimate veto when making decisions after a cost-analysis has been completed.

Having the case study included throughout the last few chapters has also been helpful for me. While not an actual study, it is giving me some insight into the thoughts and perspectives, but also the volume of work that is conducted throughout the process. I have no doubt of the many hours put into a program evaluation; I know how many hours I am spending learning about it! This does however put things into perspective with timelines, personnel involvement, etc. More and more am I discovering that my suspicions were correct and there is a complex and intricate process with a lot of overlap between methods and designs.